

Australian Bush Craftsmen

by Paul Wheeldon NDHS member



The photo is of my great grandfather's sister, Rose Muller (nee Wheeldon) in a sulky with one of her children outside the Cunning Reading Room on 10 August 1900.

It has often been said that necessity is the mother of invention.

No doubt the necessities of the Australian bushman were many, which accounted for the versatility of his early and repeated inventions and improvisations, which are not particularly confined to his early pioneering forebears and today we see continuous evidence of his creative ability.

It's the versatility of the Australian bushman and woman that built Australia's outback. The bushman excelled in using the materials at hand. His early bark hut, with bark roof and slab walls from the split timber at hand, was a symbol of the pioneer.

Apart from the care of his animals and the treatment of their maladies, this same ability of improvisation was apparent in his everyday routine. Some of these accomplishments in nearly every trade are really astounding. Many of their handcrafts would in many cases astonish today's generation.

To replace a worn or faulty thread on a bolt or, perhaps even a sulky axle nut, was quite an accomplishment. The thread would be started with a three-cornered file often as small as six or seven millimetres. As the filing progressed, the nut would be advanced and tested as to fit and the work carried on until the necessary length of

thread required was reached by the patient and slow process of one thread at a time. Time was of no serious consequence and in the case of a sulky or dray axle nut and axle thread, the place would be without transport to bring in supplies.

Of course many homesteads had a forge and many tools and the like were hand-made in the smithy. Many were renowned for their horse and bullock shoes.

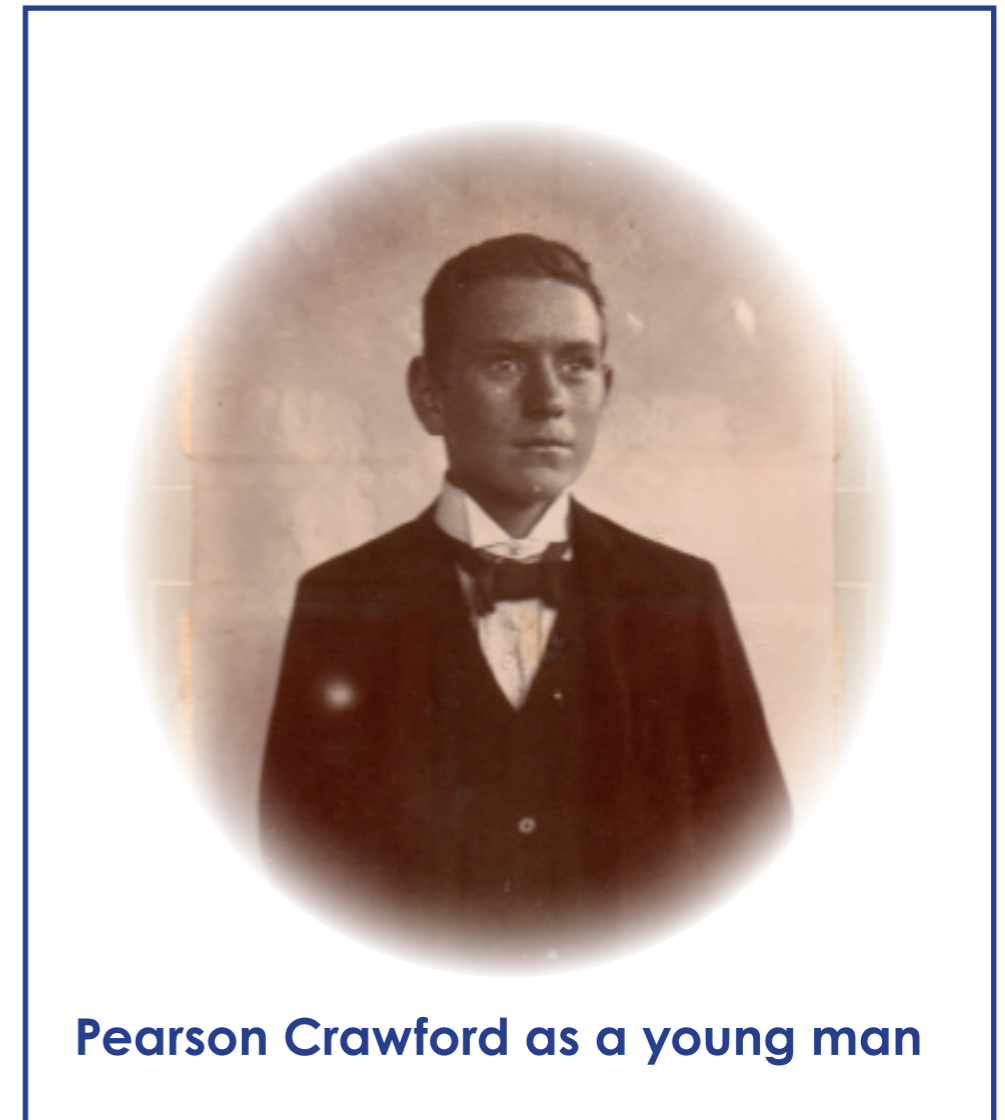
Crude and rustic wood work was another accomplishment from simple chairs and general furniture to the rough old gate probably made of saplings on the dividing paddock fence. A comfortable bed was made from the use of four forked sticks, two lengths of sapling and perhaps a couple of chaff bags. The fire place was probably made from stones at hand.

In the wood work creations, whittling as it was known, was quite a skill. Often the only tool employed was a sharp pocket knife. Many tobacco pipes were whittled out of a selected piece of timber and finished with a piece of broken glass and scraped to a nicety. The hole in the stem was as often as not burnt out with a piece of red hot fencing wire. Whittling was a rewarding spare time occupation especially for teamsters and drovers on the road. Another favourite piece for the whittler was a walking stick – again often quite well carved.

The finest stock whip handles one could imagine were made in this way. Some were quite elaborately carved and even inset with polished pieces of bone. Many intricate designs were often affected with the assistance of a red hot wire to burn out sections of the design.

The bushman excelled in his use of fencing wire. Not only did he affect temporary, and often permanent repairs, but again his creative ability was brought to the fore. While he might tie up the broken sulky shaft or the broken gate, he would make such things as the toasting fork or the grilling iron. It was almost a universal saying, 'tie it up with wire'.

The PIONEER



Pearson Crawford as a young man

Alstonville Plateau Historical Society provides a service to the public to research enquiries into the history of people, places and events relevant to both the Alstonville Plateau and Ballina Shire.

The Research Centre is open Fridays 10.00am to 4.00pm or by arrangement, and it is recommended that prior to a visit you contact us either by email (info@aphsmuseum.org.au) or at the Research Centre so we can send you our research form and ensure we have a member to help you.



Official Newsletter of the
Alstonville Plateau Historical Society
September 2020 • Volume 20, No 3

September 2020

Featuring:

The Truck

Dee Family of Uralba Road, Alstonville

Pearson Crawford (1889 - 1952)

Crawford House Museum

In our current exhibition Waste Wise we have included a Gift Shop selling

Antiques and Collectables

(Items donated by APHS members)



Quilt Raffle

A contemporary design in red and orange on a grey background to represent the 2020 fiery Summer handmade by Janet Seufert from Goonellabah

TICKET PRICE \$2 EACH OR 3 FOR \$5

Crawford House open Fridays 10.00 to 4.00 and
Sundays 1.00 to 4.00
6628 1829 info@aphsmuseum.org.au



Drawn in October



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PUBLISHED

MARCH, JUNE, SEPTEMBER, DECEMBER

The Pioneer Editor: John Sim 6687 8469

Please send all contributions to John Sim.

Production: Rosemary Weaver 6628 3842



Alstonville Plateau Historical Society Inc.
Established 21 October 2001 • ABN 14 079 187 469

Affiliated with the Royal Australian Historical Society
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https://www.facebook.com/pages/Crawford
House-Museum/237678339768274

Museum: Open Fridays 10am-4pm and Sundays 1-4pm

Research Centre: Open Fridays 10.00-4.00pm

PATRONS: K.Hogan MP, Cr D Wright, T. Smith MP

SOCIETY'S AIMS

To collect, preserve, display and provide documents and photos of an historical nature of the Alstonville Plateau and Ballina Shire for current and future generations. We welcome stories, photos and family histories for our records and newsletter publications.

HISTORICAL SOCIETY MEETINGS

3rd Sunday of each month at 2pm
Alstonville Community Resource Centre
Crawford House, 10 Wardell Road, Alstonville.
(Guest speaker and general meeting)

CORRESPONDENCE AND ENQUIRIES

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Due 1 October each year
(Includes public risk insurance and quarterly newsletters)
Fees: Adult \$25; Family \$40; Student \$5
(Please add \$5.00 if newsletters are to be posted)
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(Incl. newsletter advertisement and full membership)

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Marguerite Fuller, Jane Gardiner, Ian Kirkland, John Sim, Ina le Bas

A Very Old Grader

In early June, Ballina Shire Council approached the APHS about "a very old grader in its depot," suggesting it could be an Adams Pull grader dating from the 1940s or 1950s that had belonged to Tintenbar Shire Council.

Research undertaken, using our own resources suggest the grader in fact dates from the 1920s. After expenditure of some 8000 pounds on road making equipment in January 1927, Tintenbar Shire was able to claim "its road plant is one of the finest in the state."

Shire engineer (Mr LR Watson) was instrumental in its purchase having visited Sydney to watch it in action. At the conclusion of one Council meeting, he screened motion pictures "to an interested audience" explaining various methods of road making and re-conditioning as the film progressed. Mr Watson expressed the opinion that the tractor and grader "were to be the salvation of the roads and the shire." (Northern Star, 1/4/27)

Follow up newspaper accounts indicated it was "forming, widening and grading 40 chains a day" while doing the work "fifteen times as cheap as the old plant." (Northern Star, 18/4/27)

In addition to providing Council with these details, APHS member Ian Cooke has expressed a willingness to preserve and display the grader along with other objects from the Lumley Park enclosure.

John Sim



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Going, going, gone...

As yet we do not know the exact age of the Norfolk Pine cut down by Essential Energy on Sunday 26th July. However we do know it grew on a block originally owned by William Crawford. Subsequently the block was owned by the Kelly family and is now the site of the UPA Office.

Member Ian Cooke says he remembers the tree in the 1950s when the house was owned by the Kellys. Ian said it was a big tree then and had probably reached its maximum height. With this statement in mind we can guess it was probably about 100 years old.

Its huge girth would also suggest an age of over 100 years but without the help of a dendrochronologist, we don't really know.

Foreman Crawford talks expansively about tree planting in Alstonville in his book *Duck Creek Mountain (1983 p302)*. Unfortunately he doesn't tell us about this tree but he points out that on Arbor Day, about 1900, two Richmond River pines were planted in the school grounds and Norfolk Island pines were planted by Andrew Freeborn's son (c1910) which are still growing in the vicinity of Tanamera Drive.

Jane Gardiner

Farewell Norfolk Island Pine

PS. Does anyone remember this tree with Christmas lights on?

Dee Family of Uralba Road, Alstonville

John and Mary Dee (nee McMullen) purchased Portion 68 at 634 Uralba Road Alstonville in 1904 from James Leadbeatter. They were living at Rous at the time.

On arrival at the new property, they lived in a house on the western boundary of the property for approximately 6 years; their grandson Donald Gillies believed the current house (pictured below) was built circa 1910.



house after Arthur and Elizabeth moved. Following the death of Angus, the house and five surrounding acres were sold along with five acres of Portion 50 fronting onto the southern side of Uralba Road.

Dairy farming provided the main income for the family until the early 1970s when the

industry converted to bulk milk collection. The family then went into

growing sugar cane on all of the Dees Lane property and approximately one third of the Uralba Road property. The remainder of the property was used for grazing beef cattle.

The family also grew various small crops to supplement their income while they were dairying including peas, beans, bananas, peanuts and sweet potatoes. Beetroot and pineapples were also grown and sold to the Golden Circle Cannery in



Ballina.

Mabel & Malcolm's second son Don and his wife Jean continued farming the properties until Don suffered a stroke at the end of September 2010. The property bounded by Uralba Road, Dees and Dou-Jea Lanes was sold at the end of 2016.

Jean Gillies



Jean still lives and works on the remainder of the family farm which is on the northern side of Uralba Road. The farming enterprises are macadamia nuts, beef cattle agistment and oriental lillies grown on a few acres which are rented out.

They had six children namely:

- Flora 11th September to 28th December 1885,
- Margaret 22nd September 1886 to 21st October 1968 (never married),
- Arthur 8th July 1888 to 16th August 1973,
- Mabel 16th August 1890 to 24th November 1985,
- Bertram 9th October 1892 to 24th March 1917 (never married) He died from meningitis a few weeks after arriving in England during WWI and is buried in Salisbury cemetery.
- Emily 8th August 1894 to 26th July 1925 (never married).

In 1912, John and Mary Dee purchased portion 93, which is in Dees Lane. Arthur and his wife Elizabeth lived on and worked this property. In the same year they also purchased portion 50, which is on both sides of Uralba Road right down to Duck Creek. The Dee property was approximately 170 acres.

Mabel, who married Malcolm Gillies, and Margaret lived with their parents in the family home until their deaths.

Mabel and Malcolm's son Angus, his wife Mary and children Andrew and Ruth moved into the Dees Lane

The Truck - or where there's a will there's a way

In October 1945 Signalmen Walter Roberts BEM had returned to Australia and was staying with his in-laws in Campsie while waiting to be demobilised.

His wife Stella and young daughter Olwen were living with Stella's father William Western in Wingham on the Manning River.

The family planned to return north back to their home - a pineapple and ginger plantation on the Pimlico Road between Wardell and Ballina on the Richmond River. Before that could be done, they needed a vehicle, a truck (utility) for transport and farm work.

At the end of the war such vehicles were rare and Sydney was the best place to find one. In the Sydney Morning Herald a Chevrolet car was advertised for sale. Walter went to the address but the seller informed him that he had no chance as keen buyers were waiting at the Herald printery at 2am to get the bargains. However, the seller must have had sympathy for the soldier (still in uniform) because he continued the discussion by saying, "As a matter of fact I will be selling another Chev car this coming Saturday."

Walter asked whether he could see it. The seller informed him that it was a car not a ute.

Walter responded by stating, "If I buy it I can do what I like with it, can't I?"

"Yes, I suppose you can," the seller agreed.

So Walter bought the car.

Back in Campsie Walter's brother-in-law Frank told him that he had done the wrong thing because only vehicles with 4 wheel brakes could be registered. Undeterred he took it to Strathfield Police Station to be registered. As well as being unregistered, further problems were that at that time he would need coupons to purchase benzene (petrol).

He also had to be able to inform the police what day and time he could bring the vehicle to the Registry Office to be inspected before it could be registered. Officially he was still in the army and

couldn't make a definite appointment time. A further complication was that he had a Motor Bike licence, but not a driver's licence!

An examiner overheard the conversation, and in an aside to Walter said, "Aren't they a lot of bastards?" But he helped by handing Walter a petrol coupon for two gallons. That made Walter feel that his luck was in.

He took the vehicle to the Registry Office. The examiner said, "I can't register this vehicle." He then walked to the rear of the car and put his fist through the back window of the canvas hood. "She's right now mate. You can see out the back now." He also handed Walter two more petrol coupons.

The fact that he didn't have a Driver's Licence was something that could be rectified later. As a Dispatch Rider in the 6th Division Signals Corps he had a motorbike licence and that would have to do.

So Walter drove from the Sydney suburb of Campsie to Wingham. There, he and his father-in-law converted the car into a utility. William was a carpenter and had purchased the necessary timber to complete the conversion. The truck had a timber-floored tray, a bench seat down each side and a tailgate that was hinged to open downwards.

Thus equipped the Roberts family returned to the pineapple plantation at Wardell. The truck, RU849, served the family for a



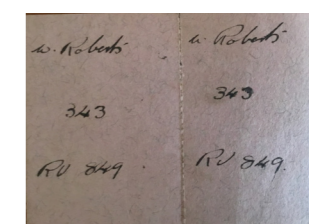
The truck outside our house at Wardell, loaded with pineapples to be taken to Ballina.

number of years.

Walter kept two of the petrol coupons. On the back of each coupon he wrote his name and the registration number of the vehicle he owned.

Olwen King

(Compiled from notes written by my father, Walter Roberts).



The Eighth Child - Pearson Crawford (1889 - 1952)

Many 19th century farmers in the Alstonville area had large families and William and Charlotte Crawford were no exception. They had 10 children some of whom we know well like James Foreman and William Ambrose. Until now Pearson's story has remained quiet due to the fact that at the age of 33 he, and his young family, moved to Orange. However recent contact with his grand daughter Gwen Krause has changed all that. Gwen has sent photographs of Pearson from his youth to his subsequent wedding, and family life both here and in Orange and Molong.



Pearson was just two years older than Foreman and it appears that as children they were good friends. Foreman tells many a story about activities with Pearson in his Duck Creek Mountain book ranging from wagging school to playing games with the dairy herd. Pearson attended Alstonville Public School, and like his brothers and sisters, only attended until he was 14 or 15.

By mid August 1907 he was dairying with Foreman on their father's land at Uralba. According to Gwen's notes he and Foreman received no wages until 1909 when they became 'share farmers'. This situation didn't last for long and their father William offered



them tenancy of the farm at a rental of one pound per ten acres. Soon they bought the stock from William and were planning to buy the land when William suddenly died.

So in 1912 the farm was divided with Pearson and Foreman each buying a portion from their mother. Pearson's

property was called 'Glenfern' and Foreman's 'Fermanagh'. The year 1912 was auspicious for Pearson as this was the year he married Rebecca 'Bec' Mary Blanch(e) from 'Glenona', Rous. As you can see from the photograph the wedding was

a large affair with a report in the Northern Star ⁽¹⁾ describing everything from the 'Recherche breakfast' to the wedding service, clothing and gifts.

Life in Alstonville was busy for Pearson with a new family, a farm to run and duties associated with the Lynwood Methodist



The wedding was a large affair

Church. At various times he was Secretary of the Young Men's Brotherhood, a Trustee, Trust Secretary and lay preacher. In 1916 his only daughter Eunice arrived.

In June 1918 Pearson enlisted to fight in World War I and his brother Ambrose went to Sydney to see him off on the SS *Carpentaria*. He never arrived in Europe, but was willing to serve his mates by accepting the position of first President of the Alstonville Sub Branch of the Returned Soldiers', Sailors and Airmen's Imperial League (RSL).

'Indifferent health' was the reason Pearson gave for leaving the area in his farewell speech to the Alstonville community at the Lynwood Church in 1922 ⁽²⁾. He hoped that his family would return after a change of climate but that was not be. The small family settled first in Orange where Pearson ran a furniture business, Murray and Crawford, in Summer Street, Orange ⁽³⁾. Here he became active in the community, serving as an Orange Councillor and Deputy Mayor from 1930 to 1936. He was also involved as a lay preacher to many outlying small communities and was interested in the educational affairs of Wolaroi College, Orange ⁽⁴⁾ (now known as Kinross Wolaroi Co-Educational School). Despite his many commitments he still managed to have some fun as we can see in this 'Mock Wedding'. Pearson must have had a longing for farm life and in 1936

bought a farm at Molong that he called 'Brookida Downs' after the name of his father's Alstonville property. As an aside this Alstonville property is now the home of our member Gail Woodgate-Brennan. Unfortunately he didn't farm for long at Molong and in February 1939 ⁽⁵⁾ we



Mock Wedding, 1932

read that there is a clearing sale at Brookida Downs.

It seems 'Bec' and Pearson retired to Sydney (1940) where their only daughter Eunice was studying to become a nurse. Eunice's position in Sydney was cemented when she married and became Mrs Yates. The parents moved around southern Sydney eventually buying 6 Edna Avenue, Penshurst. Unfortunately Pearson died in 1952, at the early age of 63 ⁽⁶⁾, before taking up residence at this address.



Eunice Margaret Crawford

Authors: Gwen Krause (grand daughter of Pearson Crawford), Jane Gardiner and Helen James.

References:

- (1) Northern Star 1/10/1912 p6 (2) Northern Star 23/8/1922 p3 (3) The Leader 5/7/1929 p8 (4) Barrier Miner 26/2/1936 p3 (5) Molong Express and Western District Advertiser 18/2/1939 p10 (6) The Methodist 15/11/1952 p10

APHS now has an eBay store

APHS opened its eBay store in February 2020. Although we have all the books for sale on eBay, they are still available to purchase from the museum.

Signed copies fetch a higher price but APHS members can still buy their books with no charge for the author's signature.

Almost 50 books are listed on eBay, and so far we've sold \$713.00 worth and our books have already had more than 2000 'views'.

We have also started selling donated items from APHS members on eBay and our first one, a beautiful oil painting (which has no significance to the local area), sold for \$200.

So if you have any books; old, history or classics or other interesting items you would like to donate which have no local history attached to them please bring them in.

Gail Brennan

President's Report

I hope everyone is managing to stay safe and well during these difficult times. The virus has certainly had a major impact on the museum with little income since it appeared. Procedures have been put into place to safeguard people attending the museum.

Thanks to those volunteers who have allowed us to reopen the museum. It would be good to see more people attending the present display on recycling waste as there are some interesting items.

Our books have started to sell since Gail set up an eBay store and a painting donated by Jan Regan has also sold. Jan kindly donated several paintings which will be sold to raise funds. A big thank you to Jan. I must also thank Mick for trimming the hedge at the back of the CRC.

Other members have been busy trying to make the office more efficient and trying to make space for our ever expanding files. The Monday afternoon group has continued to enter data into Mosaic. Lynne has been, as usual, keeping a close eye on our finances. The strategic plan as well as roles and responsibilities are still being worked on.

Unfortunately we have had to cancel Sydney or the Bush and it is hard to plan ahead for 2021, an important year as it is the society's 20th birthday. I am in the process of recording the society's history for a book to be published next year.

We also hope to have a reunion of present and former members who have contributed to the society during this time. That will probably occur in October 2021.

Some time this month our new fence should be erected as we have the grant money in the bank.

We need volunteers for the stall in the Plaza on Saturday August 22 and on the same day to sell raffle tickets outside the old Commonwealth Bank site. Unfortunately we are not allowed to sell raffle tickets at the stall in the Plaza. This year the stall isn't costing us anything.

Please let me know if you can help with the stalls.

Let's hope that things will return closer to normal very soon.

Due to illness in their families Ruth and Lois have been unable to contribute to this edition.

Ian